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**AN INVESTIGATION OF AGENCY
IN CHILDREN'S OWN NARRATIVE WRITING
BEFORE AND AFTER EXPOSURE TO COUNTER-SEXIST TEXTS**

BY

JANE NOLAN, Dip. Teach.

**A thesis submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the
Requirements for the Award of
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at the
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USE OF THESIS

The Use of Thesis statement is not included in this version of the thesis.

Abstract

This research focuses on the issue of gender in education. It looks at the role counter-sexist texts play in the formation, consolidation and interruption of children's gender ideology. It initially investigates whether or not counter-sexist texts can change agency in children's writing by analysing children's own narrative writing. Then it seeks to shed light on the ways that children respond to these types of texts by using transcripts from discussion sessions.

The sample consisted of 20 students from a Western Australian state primary school. These students were randomly distributed into a control and experimental group. Each week, for a period of five weeks, the participants took part in discussions about various texts. The experimental group studied counter-sexist texts, while the control group studied their regular classroom texts. Writing samples from both groups were collected prior to the commencement of treatment, during treatment and after treatment. Tape recordings of the sessions were also made. This data was used to answer the research questions. i.e. to investigate the effect that exposure to and discussion about counter-sexist texts has on agency in children's own narrative writing and to describe how it does or does not change children's gender ideology. The data were analysed in the following ways: Writing samples were analysed for male and female Actors and Agents. 2(group) x 2(test) ANOVAs were conducted to determine significance of treatment on agency in the participants' writing. Transcribed tape recordings of the sessions were analysed to provide possible reasons for the quantitative results found.

Overall, the results showed that there was a dominance of male Agents and Actors in children's own narrative writing. Furthermore, they showed that the treatment had no significant effect on Agency in children's own narrative writing. i.e. exposure to and discussion about counter-sexist texts did not appear to change children's gender ideology. The *Discussion* chapter analysed the transcribed tape recordings to explore possible reasons for these findings. Finally, indications for future research and implications for classroom teachers were provided.

Declaration

"I certify that this thesis does not incorporate, without acknowledgment, any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text"

Signature of Jane Frances Nolan

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LIST OF TABLES

	Page
Table 1	
Data Analysis	28
Table 2	
Number of Clauses Written With Male and Female Actors at the Pre-test and Post-test	32
Table 3	
Number of Clauses Written With Male and Female Agents at the Pre-test and Post-test	33
Table 4	
Relevance for Classroom Teachers Using English Student Outcome Statements in the Substrand of Contextual understanding in the Strand of Reading and Viewing	54

LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
Figure 1	
Conceptual Framework	20
Figure 2	
Research Design	23

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Abstract	ii
Declaration	iv
Acknowledgements	v
List of Tables	vi
List of Figures	vii
 I INTRODUCTION	
Background	1
Significance of Study	5
Statement of the Problem	6
Definition of Terms	7
 II LITERATURE REVIEW	
Gender stereotypes in texts read by children	10
Gender stereotypes in children's writing	14
Exposure to counter-sexist texts	16
 III CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK	19

IV METHODOLOGY

Sample	21
Research Design	23
Instruments and Materials	24
Procedure	25
Data Coding and Analysis	27
Coding Notes	29

V RESULTS

Frequency of male and female Actors and Agents	31
Significance of Treatment	34

VI DISCUSSION

Treatment Time	38
'Cultural Trueness' of Texts	39
Resisting and Increasing Fixedness of own Position	43
Reconstructing Gender Order	46
Hypothesis Guessing	47
Texts	49

Critical Reading	50
Diffusion Effect	50
Conclusion	51
VII CONCLUSION	
Responses Produced by Participants	52
Other Possible Explanations for Results	52
Indications for Future Research	53
Implications for Classroom Teachers	53
References	57
Appendix A: Treatment Activities and Synopses of Texts	62
Appendix B: Instructions to Classroom Teachers	66
Appendix C: Coding Table	67
Appendix D: Example of a Coded Text	68
Appendix E: Pre-test Raw Data	70
Appendix F: Post-test Raw Data	72

Chapter 1

Introduction

Background

The issue of gender in schools has been raised as an important one over recent years. There have been a number of reports published by Australian government bodies which address this issue, such as the *National Action Plan for the Education of Girls* (Australian Educational Council, 1993) and a report on the *National Policy for the Education of Girls in Australian Schools* (Department of Employment, Education and Training, 1988).

These documents reflect the current concern about the state of women's and girls' affairs in Australian society. Several newspaper articles over recent months, however, have reported a decline in boys' academic standards. In New South Wales, "girls' average Tertiary Entrance score (TES) in 1993 was on average 17 marks higher than that for boys, compared with a 1.6 mark difference in 1981" (Morris, 1994, p. 14). Concern over these figures has resulted in a push by education ministers "to broaden the national taskforce on the education of girls to include boys" (Jones, 1994, p. 8).

It appears however, that gaining higher TES marks than boys may not hold much cultural capital for girls. That is, even though girls may achieve higher TES marks than boys, they do not seem to be rewarded for this when they leave school. This notion is supported by Clark (1993) who states that "despite almost fifteen years of research and action designed to improve the educational and occupational experiences of girls and women in Australia, there is evidence that much less has changed than we might have expected or hoped for" (p. 2). This

is further illustrated by figures presented by the Women's Bureau (1987) who report that "women are in the majority in unemployment, underemployment, pension and poverty statistics, and we still have a highly gender segregated labour market where female average earnings are 66% of male average earnings" (as cited in Clark, 1993, p. 2). The Australian Bureau of statistics found that "median earnings for full-time adult non-managerial males increased by 5.2 per cent and female median earnings increased by 2.7 per cent" (1993, p. 1). In addition to this they report that "relative to male earnings, the average weekly ordinary time earnings of full-time adult non-managerial females fell from 91.9 percent (in 1992) to 91.1 percent" in 1993 (1993, p. 1). It was also found that males are under represented in occupations such as teaching and nursing (1992, p. 43). These occupations do not seem to be as attractive to males, even though they are legally available.

Why then is this the case? Why are both women and men disadvantaged in many areas?

There has been evidence to suggest that the reasons for this are due to prevailing attitudes about what it is to be a male or a female (Australian Education Council, 1993, p. 8). Males are generally thought to be more aggressive, more adventurous, more competitive and braver than females are. Females are thought to possess qualities such as nurturing, caring and passivity.

So, where then do these ideas about what it is to be male or female come from? There are many possible sources. For example, the media often portrays males and females in these ways. Secondly, parental attitudes about maleness and femaleness are conveyed and instilled in children from a very early age (Khoshkhedal, 1994). Thirdly, teachers' attitudes and therefore behaviours towards boys and girls have been found to be markedly different (Poynton, 1985). Fourthly, the way language operates reflects the ideology of the people who

Speak it. It has been asserted that the way males and females talk is different and that these differences reflect the ideologies of what it is to be a male and a female (Poynton 1985). For example: men tend to interrupt women in mixed sex conversations more often than women interrupt men; men tend to be given a longer pause after their turn in speaking than do women; women make more back-channels such as *mm hmm*, *yeah* and *I see*, signalling that the lines of communication are still open; men tend to make more commands than do women; women use more euphemisms than men do; women use politeness markers, such as 'please' and 'thanks', more often than men do (Poynton, 1985, pp. 70 - 73). Holmes (1985) suggests three reasons which may account for these differences. Firstly, women use more standard speech forms than men because they are more status conscious than men. A second possible explanation points to the way society tends to expect 'better' behaviour from women than from men. Another possible reason is that people who are subordinate (eg. women) must be polite.

A final possible source which may naturalise ideas about gender are the books read by children. They depict male and female characters in limited and unrealistic ways (Gilbert, with Rowe, 1989, Baker and Davies, 1993). The way males and females are depicted in children's literature will be more closely examined in the *Literature Review* chapter.

These factors described above may contribute in a cumulative way to the maintenance of the inequities experienced by people in our society.

How then can teachers help to disrupt this process whereby boys and girls are channelled into ways of being as determined by their gender? Two possible ways have been suggested.

Firstly, through the use of children's literature which challenges traditional gender stereotyping (Baker and Davies, 1993, Gilbert, with Rowe, 1989, Gilbert, 1992). Secondly, through the

teaching of critical reading strategies in order to assist children in resisting stereotypical portrayals of men and women. Gilbert (1990) asserts that:

... the reading/writing classroom needs texts which ... play with generic conventions and so highlight their own textuality; and it needs textual activities which focus on the construction of texts and the way in which texts function in social practice. (p. 102)

In other words, classrooms need texts which do not follow conventional discourses, as well as activities which focus on the socio-cultural context in which texts are constructed. This research focuses on the role these types of texts play in the formation of children's gender ideology.

Significance Of The Study

The way in which gendered stories contribute to the maintenance of inequities among males and females is well documented (Baker and Davies, 1993; Baker and Freebody, 1989; Minns, 1991; Rhedding-Jones and Atkinson, 1993; Gilbert, 1988). It has been suggested by many researchers in this field that children need to be taught to read texts critically in order for them to resist the stereotypical images of males and females which are prevalent in children's literature, and that they need to be exposed to texts which challenge these sorts of images (Gilbert, 1992; Peterson and Lach, 1990; Fox, 1993). The way males and females are depicted in the texts read by children will be more closely examined in the *Literature Review* chapter.

This study sets out to implement one of these practices (i.e. exposure of children to counter-sexist texts) recommended by researchers in the field of gender and literacy. Additionally, it sets out to determine the extent to which counter-sexist texts change children's gender ideology by examining agency in children's own narrative writing (refer to *Definition of Terms* section). The study is not concerned with the difference in agency between boys' and girls' writing. Rather, it seeks to shed light on whether or not exposure to and discussion about counter-sexist texts may be able to disrupt the gender ideology of children irrespective of their gender and how this is demonstrated through the agency in children's writing.

Additionally, it examines some processes demonstrated by children when exposed to counter-sexist texts in an attempt to explain why counter-sexist texts may or may not disrupt children's gender ideology.

Statement Of The Problem

Purpose

This study firstly seeks to investigate the effect that exposure to and discussions about counter-sexist texts has on agency in children's own narrative writing. The essential purpose of these discussions is to raise children's awareness of gender roles and of stereotyping, both in texts and the real world. Secondly, it seeks to describe how this intervention does or does not change children's gender ideology. Refer to the *Definition of Terms* section for an explanation of technical terms.

Specific Questions

1. What is the frequency of male and female Agents in children's own narrative writing before and after 'intervention'? In the context of this study, 'intervention' is defined as exposure to and discussions about counter-sexist texts.
2. Does the frequency of male and female Agents in children's own narrative writing change significantly from pre-test to post-test?
3. What is the frequency of women and men in the role of Actor in children's own narrative writing before and after intervention?
4. Is there any change in the frequency of women and men in the role of Actor in children's own narrative writing before and after intervention?
5. What is the range of children's responses that illustrate the change or lack of change in their gender ideology?

Definition Of Terms

Examples used in this section were taken from the children's own writing.

AGENCY

The notion of "whether or not one is presented as doing or being done to, as causer of actions/events or merely acted upon, what one is presented as acting upon ..."
(Poynton, 1985, p. 62)

AGENT

The causer of events and actions, one who is acting upon something or someone else. e.g. '*We grabbed fifteen dollars*'. *We* is the Agent in this case because it is the causer of actions. i.e. grabbing fifteen dollars.

MEDIUM

"... the one through which the process is actualised ..."
(Halliday, 1985, p. 146). That is, the one being done to or acted upon, or the one whose actions don't affect anyone or anything else. e.g. '*We grabbed fifteen dollars*'. *Fifteen dollars* is the Medium in this case, as it is the one being done to, i.e. it is being grabbed.

ACTOR

"... the logical subject ... the one that does the deed ..."
(Halliday, 1985, p. 109). e.g. '*I ran inside*'. *I* is the Actor in this case as it is the logical subject of the verb.

It is the one doing the deed. i.e. running.

BEHAVER

“The participant who is behaving ...” (Halliday, 1985, p. 139). e.g. performing a typically human

“physiological and psychological behaviour, like

breathing, coughing, smiling, dreaming and staring”

(Halliday, 1985, p. 139). e.g. ‘*He coughed the lolly out of his mouth*’. *He* is the Behaver in this case, as he is the one performing a physiological behaviour, i.e. coughing.

In the coding of participants’ writing samples, Behavers were included as a type of Actor.

MATERIAL PROCESSES

Verbs which pertain to an action or event (Halliday, 1985, p. 131). e.g. grab, cut, rescue.

BEHAVIOURAL PROCESSES

Verbs which pertain to behaviour (Halliday, 1985, p. 131). e.g. sneeze, cough, smile.

MENTAL PROCESSES

Verbs which pertain to perception, affection or cognition (Halliday, 1985, p. 131). e.g. think, dream.

VERBAL PROCESSES

Verbs which pertain to speech (Halliday, 1985, p. 131). e.g. talk, croak, say.

CIRCUMSTANCE

“(An element) expressing circumstance... typically, circumstantial elements are realised by adverbials and particularly by prepositional phrases.” (Chalker and Weiner, 1994, p. 61). e.g. ‘Bats were coming *out of the cupboard*’. *Out of the cupboard* is the circumstance in this case, as it describes the location of the action.

RANGE

“... the element that specifies the range or scope of the process” (Halliday, 1994, p. 146). e.g. ‘We had to write *a stupid myth*’. *A stupid myth* is the range in this case, as it specifies the scope of the writing.

BENEFICIARY

“The person (or animal) who benefits from the action of the verb” (Chalker and Weiner, 1994, p. 46). e.g. ‘He gave *me* a red chain’. *Me* is the Beneficiary in this case as it is the one receiving the red chain.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

This section will review literature relevant to this study. Three aspects will be examined: firstly, gender stereotypes prevalent in the books children read; secondly, gender stereotypes contained in children's own writing and thirdly, the effectiveness of exposure to counter-sexist texts in enabling children to resist traditional gender stereotypes.

Gender Stereotypes In Texts Read By Children

It has been found by many researchers that gender bias often occurs in the books read by children. For example, Rhedding-Jones and Atkinson (1993) state that:

Since the 1970s in Australia there have been fringe movements amongst publishers to get counter-sexist books into classrooms and households. These books are still not always easy to find, and there are many copies of the other kinds of texts around.
(p. 68).

Gilbert supports this view by stating that books used in classrooms have been found to portray women and girls in limited and unrealistic ways, despite the release of non-sexist guidelines by a number of publishing houses and concern from educators that this has a detrimental effect upon young children (Gilbert, with Rowe, 1989, p. 4). Anderson and Yip (cited in Gilbert, with Rowe, 1989) found that gender bias in reading schemes has not changed since the 1950s and 1960s. They found that occupational roles for women increased from two in 1966 to

three in 1980, but that occupational roles for men rose from eight in 1966 to nineteen in 1980. They found, however, that the illustrations had become less stereotyped.

Khoshkhedal provides further support for the assertion that gender bias is prevalent in the books read by children. She states that “... even though much has been said about the changing role of women, these changes are not adequately reflected in children’s literature” (1994, p. 28).

There have been several studies which have examined just how men and women are portrayed in children’s literature, eg Baker and Davies’ investigation of a number of commonly used books. They found that gendered references to living creatures appeared 4.5 times more often than ungendered references (1993, p. 56). The heavy use of gendered terms in early years implies to the reader that it is important for people to place themselves and others in a gendered category.

The ways in which people in these categories are shown to behave and think has been examined by Freebody and Baker (1989). Their study found subtle complexities of gender portrayal. They noted that the word *boy/s* appears more frequently than *girl/s*; that boys are more likely to be depicted as individual characters, whilst girls are more often paired; that a wider range of verbs is used to describe the actions of boys than those of girls. Furthermore, these gender biases were also found in books portraying adult behaviour. Fathers and mothers were depicted in very stereotypical roles. For example, fathers painted, pumped and fixed, whilst mothers baked, dressed and hugged. Another interesting finding was that conversational exchanges between characters reflected male dominance. In a study of 3600 lines of stories about a male and a female character, Baker and Davies found that the two

characters were given equal textual space, but that the conversations were more often about the male, the male character used the 'I' form more often than the female, and that the term *big* was used more often to describe the actions of the male.

Khoshkhedal (1994) found that:

when women appear in children's books they are often limited to the 'appropriate' traditional occupations, such as teacher, nurse or librarian - all of which are extensions of the mothering role. (p. 28).

She also asserts that beauty is portrayed to be a significant asset of women and that often their success or lack of it is attributed to their appearance. "Women's lives are trivialised and they are discriminated against on the basis of physical appearance" (p. 29). She cites an unnamed survey of a sample of children's literature which found that:

'ingenious males' outnumbered 'ingenious females' by almost six to one. There were four times as many instances of activity recorded for boys; five times as many creative males as creative females; and males were brave more than four times as often as females" (p. 29).

Gilbert, with Rowe (1989), conducted an examination of the gender bias evident in various types of books; reading schemes, picture story books and award winners, teen romance novels and traditional fairy tales. She examined two popular reading schemes used in Australian classrooms, *The Story Box* and *The Core Library*. In *The Story Box*, out of 179 characters, 92 were male and 87 were female. Women were represented in eight different occupations, while

men were represented in 20. Women were shown with some of the following objects: plate and tea towel, mixing bowl, cups of tea/coffee, typewriter, shopping bag/basket, baby, and knives and forks. The roles and responsibilities of women were also examined and it was found that of the total number of women (57), 24 were portrayed as mothers and 4 were shown as grandmothers. 39 of these 57 women were shown to be engaged in some household task. Furthermore, the settings in which the stories primarily occurred were in the home, with a nuclear family. Similar results were found in a study of *The Core Library*. Of a total of 516 characters, 385 were male while only 131 were female. Males were shown in 48 different occupations but women in only 10. Gilbert also found "girls are often absent or peripheral" in the books (1989, p. 42), and that books about girls are more difficult to find than books about boys. From her examination of traditional fairy tales, she drew the following conclusions as to what gender biases exist and the social order that is constructed by them:

- Men are supposed to be heroic and brave.
- A man should possess the qualities of wit and shrewdness.
- It is good for women to be patient, gentle, self-sacrificing, beautiful, obedient and passive.
- "Men will desire women as their wives if they are beautiful, gentle, kind and obedient, and women will wait passively for such approval" (1989, p. 53).

Gilbert found similar types of portrayals of women and men in award winning literature and romance novels. It can therefore be seen that gender stereotyping is widespread amongst texts read by and written for children.

However, as far as can be determined, there have been no studies describing agency in the texts read by and written for children.

Gender Stereotypes In Children's Writing

Poynton (1985) identifies the following differences in what girls and boys write about. Boys write more often than girls about playing or watching sport and other physical activities. Girls, on the other hand, write more about "home activities ..., dress and appearance, romance and fantasy worlds inhabited by fairies, witches, characters from children's stories ..., commercial toys ... and talking animals and objects" (p. 34). Boys' fantasy worlds, on the other hand, "are dominated by creatures from outer space, assorted monsters ..., everyday burglars, kidnappers, and murderers" (p. 35). Boys are usually accompanied on their adventures by their classmates.

Gilbert (1988) suggests that children's writing reflects traditional gender stereotyping. She asserts that this may be in part due to children not having access to counter-sexist texts.

When young girls attempt to write narratives they are forced to draw upon the textual forms they know, and it is at this first level of narrative construction that the gendered stereotypical and therefore restricted nature of most literary genres becomes obvious. (p. 16).

... whatever genre girls choose to draw upon they will find that the roles for girls within those genres are to some extent fixed and established. (p. 16).

Trepanier-Street, Romatowski and McNair (1990) examined children's written responses to stereotypical and non-stereotypical story starters.

Across stories, more male characters were added to stories than female characters and, often, the added male characters were the problem solvers. Male characters were also assigned more high-intensity actions and were more often the agents for aggressive/destructive events. (p. 60).

Gender stereotypes in children's writing were investigated by Romatowski and Trepanier-Street (1987). Stories written by both male and female writers showed strong male dominance.

Both male and female writers included more male characters ... than female characters. Male characters were assigned more attributes by male authors at all grade levels ... and by female authors grades 1-4. In addition, these male characters were endowed with very active, powerful, prestigious roles. (p. 18)

The stereotypical nature of children's writing has been investigated by other researchers. Their findings have supported the notion that children's writing is not gender-neutral. Kamler (1993) conducted one such study which provided "a tangible account of a girl and a boy taking up strongly gendered positions in their writing" (p. 101). Girls have been found to use writing to envisage their future roles as wives and mothers (Hallden, 1994). In this research, Hallden found that "the narratives can be seen as a step in socialisation to motherhood .."

(p. 3). Children's oral story telling has also been found to contain many stereotypes (Jett-Simpson and Masland, 1993). Students were asked to tell a story about a girl who wanted to play baseball with a group of boys. They found that "... most of the boys said that she got to play because of her own initiative ... Most of the girls said that the girls got to play only because the boys allowed her to participate"

(p. 106).

As far as can be determined, there have also been no studies conducted to investigate agency in children's own writing.

Exposure To Counter-Sexist Texts

It is accepted then that the books written for and read by children and children's own writing contain many gender stereotypes. What then can be done to rectify this situation? Two possible strategies have been expounded: firstly, exposing children to counter-sexist texts and secondly, teaching children critical reading strategies. This study is concerned with only one of these strategies - exposure to and discussion about counter-sexist texts.

Stereotypical portrayals of male and females in children's writing can be seen to reflect what the children read. As texts read by children "contain stereotypes in their illustrations, language, and story content" (Jett-Simpson and Masland, 1993, p. 104) so too does children's writing. Children therefore may need to be exposed to texts which offer different portrayals of males and females. As Fox (1993) states:

Could children's literature be partly to blame for the fact that we grown-up girls have been denied in our womanhood the excitement and power so readily available to boys and grown-up boys?

... Could children's literature be partly to blame for trapping males in a frightful emotional prison and demanding intolerable social expectations of them? (p. 85).

By exposing children to written texts which challenge traditional gender stereotypes, they may be offered different ways of being, rather than being confined to behaving, thinking and feeling in ways deemed appropriate to their gender.

There have been no studies, as far as can be determined, which investigate the effect exposure to counter-sexist texts has on agency in children's writing. However, some studies have been conducted which investigate how children respond orally to counter-sexist texts. Baker and Davies (1993) studied the effect that feminist texts have on children's gender ideology. They found that these texts were not able to alter the children's ideology. They assert that these types of texts:

gave subtle twists to the ways of being available to the central characters and to the story line... (however) ... these interventions appeared insufficient to persuade some children to accept the different version of the gender order that the feminist texts offered. (p.63).

Gilbert, on the other hand, asserts that children may need to be exposed to counter-sexist texts and:

Young women who do have access to other stories and other discourses are able to take up a number of reading and writing positions and to be more capable of textual resistance or critical literacy. Many women, for instance, have learnt how to read 'differently' - in this case, against the grain, or against the dominant reading position in the text ... as a result of their access to feminist discourses. (1992, p.197).

She further asserts:

What ... girls lack is a source of alternative stories to challenge the gendered generic forms of the classroom, support from their teacher readers ..., and opportunities ... in which they can talk together about their resistance to romantic ideologies. (1988, p. 18).

There appears to be some disagreement as to whether or not counter-sexist texts are able to change children's gender ideology. This study explores this notion by discussing with and exposing children to these sorts of texts and then examining agency in their writing. Additionally, it seeks to shed light on whether feminist texts are able to change children's gender ideology.

Chapter 3

Conceptual Framework

The diagram in Figure 1 (overleaf) illustrates how prevailing beliefs about gender in society contribute to, reinforce and perpetuate the maintenance of inequities experienced by males and females in society (shown as (a) in Figure 1). It can be seen that these beliefs are reflected in and perpetuated by many factors, such as the media, ways of speaking, parental and teacher behaviour, and written texts (b)- both read by and written by children (c). The factors are interdependent; they reinforce and perpetuate each other.

This research is investigating only a small area of the conceptual framework. The focus is the role that written texts (b) play in this relationship and how these ideas about gender are reflected in the agency of children's writing. It has been asserted that "writing and reading are part of the same system of signification" and that children can only write what they can read (Gilbert, with Rowe, 1989, p.65). Moreover, what they read about can help to influence and reinforce their gender ideology. Their writing can reflect this ideology, which in turn may be affected by what they read.

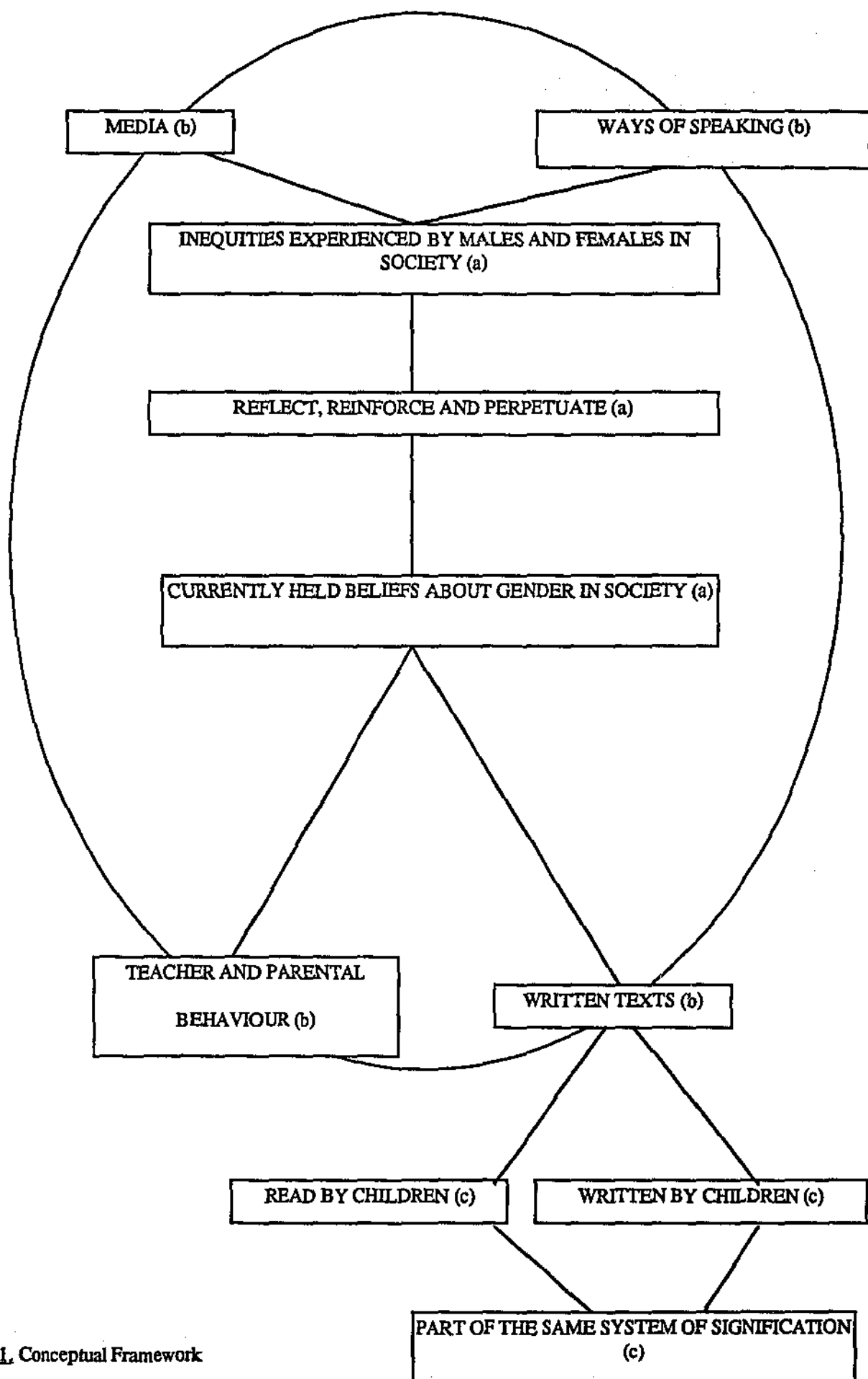


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Chapter 4

Methodology

Sample

The sample was taken from a Western Australian state primary school in the Perth metropolitan area in which the pupils are predominantly Anglo-Celtic and English speaking. The area consists of mainly Labor voters and the median cost of housing in the March quarter 1995 was between \$90,000 and \$95, 000. The median cost of Perth established houses at the same time was \$120,400 (REIWA, 1995, p. 7). The school was not classified as a Priority School. The resources in the school are varied. The school has recently purchased new reading and mathematics resources, whilst the audio-visual equipment is approximately 20 years old. The school owns nearly 20 computers, which are used by both staff and students, of which there are 349, including Pre-Primary enrolments. All teachers in the school have recently been inserviced in First Steps and this is a continuing school priority.

This school was selected as it was the most convenient for the researcher. Permission was sought and gained from the principal and relevant class teachers. Transitional spellers and Early writers (according to First Steps criteria) from the two Year Five classes were identified. Children in these classes are usually turning 10 years old. A student must display the following indicators to be considered a Transitional Speller:

- uses common English letter sequences when attempting to spell unknown words,....

- uses letters to represent all vowel and consonant sounds in a word, placing vowels in every syllable, ...
- is beginning to use visual strategies, such as knowledge of common letter patterns and critical features of words,... (Education Department of Western Australia, 1994b, p. 74.)

A student must display the following indicators to be considered an Early Writer:

- uses a small range of familiar text forms ...
- is beginning to use written language structures. Has a sense of sentence...
- writes a range of words that are personally significant...
- begins to develop editing skills...
- attempts to use some punctuation ...
- rereads own writing to maintain word sequence. ... (Education Department of Western Australia, 1994c, p. 54).

Choosing children from these two phases was done for two reasons. Firstly, having all children working in these phases allowed for a more homogeneous sample. Secondly, Transitional spellers and Early writers were chosen because their writing would be relatively easy to analyse. Their spelling and grammar should be fairly conventional and their compositions well sequenced, structured and punctuated.

Once children working in these phases were identified, stratified random sampling was employed to approximately represent the population, ie. 10 girls and 10 boys were randomly

selected from this group. The 10 boys and then the 10 girls were randomly assigned to the control group and the experimental group, resulting in five girls and five boys in each group.

Research Design

The research design was modelled on the Before-After Two-Group Design (Judd, Smith, Kidder, 1991, p. 85) as illustrated in Figure 2, in which the independent variables were the type of text to which the children were exposed and test, i.e. pre-test and post-test. The dependent variables were the proportion of male and female Agents and Actors written in texts by the control group and the experimental groups.

	Experimental Group	Control Group
Pre-test	Collection of writing samples	Collection of writing samples
Intervention	5-week exposure to counter-sexist texts	5-week exposure to regular classroom texts
Post-test	Collection of writing samples	Collection of writing samples

Figure 2. Research Design

The sample was randomly distributed from the identified group of Transitional Spellers and Early Writers into a control and a treatment group. Writing samples from both groups were collected and analysed as a “before” measure. The treatment group were then exposed to and took part in discussions about texts which challenged traditional gender stereotypes. Writing samples were then collected and analysed each week from both groups.

This design method allowed for a check by which the agency in subjects' own writing could be examined before they were exposed to texts which challenged traditional gender stereotypes. It provided a base line from which to determine the ways and extent to which agency was or was not changed by exposure to treatment. Furthermore, the control group provided a check against which to further examine and verify whether agency in the treatment group's own writing was changed by the treatment.

Instruments and Materials

The following texts were used as they were identified by the researcher as ones which challenge traditional gender stereotypes, and were read to the experimental group.

Week 1 - *The Tough Princess* (Waddell, 1986)

Week 2 - *Prince Cinders* (Cole, 1987)

Week 3 - *The Wrestling Princess* (Corbalis, 1986)

Week 4 - *The Paper Bag Princess* (Munsch, 1980)

Week 5 - *Princess Beatrice and the Rotten Robbers* (Honey, 1988)

It should be noted that it was very difficult to find texts which were considered to challenge traditional gender stereotypes. The ones chosen were counter-sexist in that they portrayed men and women in non-stereotypical roles. However, *The Tough Princess* (Waddell, 1986) and *The Wrestling Princess* (Corbalis, 1986) still maintained the traditional notion of women searching for a husband, even though the manner in which the women found their spouses was unusual.

The following texts were used with the control group. They were taken from an anthology of creation tales titled *In the Beginning* (Cherry and McLeish, 1984).

Week One - *The Twins*

Week Two - *Seven Days*

Week Three - *Giants and Gods*

Week Four - *Amana and her Children*

Week Five - *Fire Lords*

A transcribing machine was used to record and transcribe the lessons.

Procedure

Two types of data were collected: writing samples from each of the subjects in both the control group and the treatment group and transcribed tape recordings of the lessons.

Each week, for a period of 5 weeks, two one-hour lessons were conducted by the researcher: one with the experimental group and one with the control group. During lessons with the control group their normal literature program, which at the time focussed on traditional creation tales, was followed. During lessons with the experimental group, the researcher read the subjects texts which challenged traditional gender stereotypes and discussed how males and females were portrayed in the stories.

The lesson format for the experimental group followed the outline displayed below. (For transcript examples of samples from these lessons, see the *Discussion* chapter.)

1. The researcher read children the title of the story and showed them the cover.
2. Children predicted what the story might be about.
3. The researcher read the story to the children. It was found that during the reading time, children would spontaneously respond to the story with comments or questions. Examples of these can be found in the *Discussion* chapter.
4. The researcher asked the children whether or not they enjoyed the story and the reasons for their opinions.
5. The children were asked what sorts of activities the male and female characters in the story were engaged in, the personal characteristics of these characters, and how they may have been portrayed differently than characters in traditional stories.
6. The children then completed an activity. For details of these activities and brief synopses of the texts used, refer to Appendix A.

The day after each lesson given by the researcher, the classroom teachers of both the control group and the experimental group asked all their students to write a narrative on a topic of their individual choice. The teachers were provided with written guidelines to ensure that they gave identical instructions. For details of these, refer to Appendix B.

Each week, classroom teachers gave the researcher writing samples from the control group and the experimental group. These were then analysed. When children were absent on the day of narrative writing, they wrote a narrative on the day they returned to school and these samples were then given to the researcher. (Subject 6 and Subject 11 were absent for Lesson 2, and Subject 5 was absent for Lesson 3.)

Unfortunately, the post-test writing samples from a number of students were mislaid by one of the classroom teachers. As a full sample of children's writing was unavailable, it was decided that all children's post-test samples would be destroyed and a new post-test would be conducted. The following week, the two classes were asked by their teachers to write another narrative. These were then given to the researcher and were used as the new post-test samples.

Data Coding and Analysis

The table outlined in Appendix C was used to code data collected.

Data was analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively. Table 1 describes how the research questions were analysed.

Table 1.

Data Analysis

	RESEARCH QUESTIONS	ANALYSIS
1.	What is the frequency of male and female Agents in children's own narrative writing before and after intervention?	A simple number count was conducted to determine the frequency of male and female Agents in both the pre-test and the post-test.
2.	Does the frequency of male and female Agents in children's own narrative writing change significantly from pre-test to post-test?	Two tests were conducted. Firstly, the proportion of clauses with female Agents at pre-test and post-test in both the control and experimental groups' writing was tested for significance using $2(\text{group}) \times 2(\text{test})$ ANOVA. Secondly, the proportion of clauses with male Agents at pre-test and post-test in both the control and experimental groups' writing was tested for significance using a $2(\text{group})$ by $2(\text{test})$ ANOVA.
3.	What is the frequency of women and men in the role of Actor in children's own narrative writing before and after intervention?	A simple number count was conducted to determine the frequency of male and female Actors.

4.	Is there any change in the frequency of women and men in the role of Actor in children's own narrative writing before and after intervention?	<p>Two tests were conducted. Firstly, the proportion of clauses with female Actors at pre-test and post-test in both the control and experimental groups' writing was tested for significance using a 2(group) by 2(test) ANOVA.</p> <p>Secondly, the proportion of clauses with male Actors at pre-test and post-test in both the control and experimental groups' writing was tested for significance using a 2(group) by 2(test) ANOVA.</p>
5.	What is the range of children's responses that illustrate the change or lack of change in their gender ideology?	Transcribed tape recordings of the treatment were analysed.

Coding Notes

Each writing sample was analysed using the table shown in Appendix C. (Figures derived from coding notes can be found in Appendix D and Appendix E). Each clause in all pre-test and post-test writing samples was examined to determine whether or not it had an Actor, and whether the Actor functioned as an Agent. Only Material and Behavioural processes were analysed as these were thought to be most relevant to the study. This is because they can have an agent, unlike Mental, Verbal and Relational processes. Material and Behavioural processes are more 'active' verbs; they are 'action' processes. Mental and Verbal processes were

considered more 'passive' as they code thinking and saying processes, and they were therefore not included in the analysis. For a further explanation of these terms, see *Definition of Terms* section.

Clauses with material and behavioural processes were then further examined to determine the realisation of the following semantic roles: Actors (including those that were Agents), Processes, Mediums, and other roles such as Circumstance, Range and Beneficiary. See the *Definition of Terms* section for a description of these roles.

Only ranking clauses were included, i.e. embedded clauses were excluded as it was felt unnecessary to go into the detail required for this degree of analysis. Non-finite clauses were also included (eg 'Running along, I came upon a rabbit'. The non-finite clause here is 'Running along'.) Implied mediums were included, as agency is implied in these cases. (eg 'She drove'. The implied medium here is 'car'.) Agentless passives were also included as there is an Agent, but it is not stated. (eg 'He was killed'.) In these cases, coding was only done for the Medium. For an example of a coded text, see Appendix D.

The titles of these texts are listed in the *Instruments* section of this chapter. It must be emphasised that 'treatment' involved not just exposure to counter-sexist texts, but the process during which the subjects examined these types of texts. (See the *Discussion* chapter for examples of this process.) The control group was exposed to their usual types of texts, which at the time were taken from an anthology of creation myths titled *In the Beginning* (Cherry and McLeish, 1984). (See *Instruments* section of this chapter for a list of these texts.)

Chapter 5

Results

This section will present the overall findings of the study, while interpretation of these results will be given in the *Discussion* chapter. The general aim was to investigate the significance of treatment on the frequency of female and male Actors and Agents in children's own writing. Initially a simple number count was conducted to determine the frequency of male and female Actors and Agents. These figures were then analysed using four 2(group) by 2(test) ANOVAs to determine whether or not the treatment had a significant effect on the mean proportion of male and female Actors and Agents.

Frequency Of Male And Female Actors And Agents

Overall there were more male than female Actors and Agents at both pre-test and post-test. Details of this result will now be presented.

Frequency of Male and Female Actors

This section will outline the frequency of female and male Actors in texts written by the control and experimental groups at both pre-test and post-test (Research Questions 3 and 4, p.6). Note that some of these Actors will also function as Agents. See Table 2 (overleaf).

At the pre-test, there was a mean of 4.5 clauses with male Actors by the control group and 6.5 by the experimental group. In contrast to this there was a mean of 2.9 clauses with female

Actors by the control group and 3.2 by the experimental group. At the post-test, there was a mean of 3.6 clauses with male Actors by the control group and 3.8 by the experimental group compared with a mean of 2.7 clauses with female Actors by the control group and 1.5 by the experimental group.

Table 2

Number of Clauses Written With Male and Female Actors at the Pre-test and Post-Test

	Control Group	Experimental Group	Total
Pre-test			
Mean number of clauses with Actors	9.7	11	20.7
Mean number of female Actors	2.9	3.2	6.1
% Female Actors	29.9	29.1	29.5
Mean number of Male Actors	4.5	6.5	11
% Male Actors	46.4	59.1	53.1
Post-test			
Mean number of clauses with Actors	10.9	8.9	19.8
	2.7	1.5	4.2
Mean number of clauses with Female Actors			
% Female Actors	24.7	16.8	21.2
Mean number of clauses with Male Actors	3.6	3.8	7.4
% Male Actors	33	42.7	37.4

Frequency of Male and Female Agents

This section will outline the frequency of female and male Agents in texts written by the control and experimental groups at pre-test and post-test. (Research Questions 1 and 2, p.6)

See Table 3.

Table 3

Number of Clauses With Male and Female Agents at Pre-test and Post-Test

	Control Group	Experimental Group	Total
Pre-test			
Mean number of clauses with agency	6.0	6.2	12.2
Mean number of female Agents	1.1	1.6	2.7
% Female Agents	18.3	25.8	22.1
Mean number of male Agents	3.5	4.2	7.8
% Male Agents	60	67.7	63.9
Post-test			
Mean number of clauses with Agency	4.9	4.6	10.2
Mean number of female Agents	.2	0	.2
% Female Agents	4.1	0	2
Mean number of male Agents	2.6	2.6	5.2
% Male Agents	53.1	56.5	51

There were more male than female Agents at both pre-test and post-test. At the pre-test, there was a mean of 3.5 clauses with male Agents by the control group and 4.2 by the experimental group. The control group wrote a mean of 1.1 clauses with female Agents and the experimental group wrote 1.6. At the post-test, there was a mean of 2.6 clauses with male Agents by the control group and 2.6 by the experimental group. The control group wrote a mean of 0.2 clauses with female Agents and the experimental group wrote none.

This number count shows a dominance of male Actors and Agents. Male Actors and Agents were included in more clauses at all points: from pre-test to post-test and between both groups. Overall there were more male Actors and Agents than female Actors and Agents. Moreover, there were no female Agents written by the experimental group at the post-test.

Significance Of Treatment

The above findings were then analysed to determine whether or not the treatment had a significant effect on the mean proportion of clauses with male and female Actors and Agents. Four 2(group) by 2(test) ANOVAs were conducted with male Actors, female Actors, male Agents and female Agents (respectively). For each test, three results are given: group by test (interaction), test, and group effects.

Female Actors

There was no significant interaction between group and testing time, $F(1, 18) = .19, p = .66$.

This indicates that treatment did not have any significant effect on the number of female Actors in children's stories.

There was also no significant difference in the proportion of clauses written with female Actors between the pre-test ($M = 30.59, SD = 32.83$) and post-test ($M = 16.00, SD = 31.10$) regardless of group, $F(1, 18) = 2.00, p = .18$. Nor was there found to be a significant difference in the proportion of female Actors between the control group ($M = 2.80, SD = 3.26$) and the experimental group ($M = 2.35, SD = 2.66$), $F(1, 18) = .49, p = .49$.

Male Actors

Between both groups from pre-test to post-test, there was found to be no significant difference in the proportion of male Actors, $F(1, 18) = .30, p = .59$. This indicates that the treatment did not have any significant effect here either.

There was also no significant difference in the proportion of male Actors between the pre-test ($M = 47.76, SD = 35.92$) and the post-test ($M = 39.54, SD = 36.84$) regardless of group, $F(1, 18) = .79, p = .39$. Nor was there any significant difference overall, regardless of pre-test and post-test, in the proportion of male Actors between the control group ($M = 4.05, SD = 3.17$) and the experimental group ($M = 5.15, SD = 4.28$), $F(1, 18) = .55, p = .47$.

Overall, the result was that there was no significant difference in clauses with male or female Actors from pre-test to post-test, or between the groups. The treatment also was found not to have had a significant interaction effect on either male or female Actors.

Female Agents

Between both groups, from pre-test to post-test, there was found to be no significant difference in the proportion of female agency, $F(1, 18) = .09, p = .77$. This indicates that treatment had no significant effect on the phenomenon.

However, there was a significant difference in the proportion of clauses written with female Agents between post-test ($M = 3.73, SD = 12.23$) and pre-test ($M = 24.88, SD = 39.00$) regardless of group, $F(1, 18) = 6.35, p = .02$. Both groups' writing contained significantly fewer proportions of female Agents at the post-test than at the pre-test. For a discussion of possible interpretations of this result, see the *Discussion* chapter.

When pre-test and post-test results were combined to give an overall picture, there was found to be no significant difference in the proportion of female agency between the control group ($M = .65, SD = .91$) and the experimental group ($M = .80, SD = 1.35$), $F(1, 18) = .24, p = .63$.

Male Agents

Between both groups, from pre-test to post-test, there was no significant difference, $F(1,18) = .56, p = .46$. This indicates that the treatment had no significant effect on male agency.

Neither was there any significant difference in the proportion of male Agents between the post-test ($M = 48.96, SD = 44.64$) and pre-test ($M = 58.30, SD = 40.39$) regardless of group, $F(1,18) = 1.04, p = .32$. Nor was there any significant difference overall, when pre-test and post-test figures were combined, in the proportion of male Agents between the control group ($M = 3.05, SD = 2.50$) and the experimental group ($M = 3.40, SD = 2.80$), $F(1,18) = .89, p = .37$.

In summary, it can be seen from a simple count of participant roles that, overall, there were more male Agents and Actors than female Agents and Actors. The treatment was found to have had no significant effect on the proportion of male or female Agents or Actors. The only significant effects were that both groups' writing contained significantly fewer proportions of female Agents at the post-test than at the pre-test. It must be noted that this was found in both groups which may suggest that it was independent of treatment. For all other proportions of clauses, there was found to be no significant difference between the pre-test and the post-test. For an analysis of possible interpretations of these results, see the *Discussion* chapter.

Chapter 6

Discussion

This section will provide possible interpretations of the results gained from the study. Two major results were found. Firstly, the treatment had no significant effect on the proportion of male or female Actors or Agents. Secondly, both groups' writing contained significantly fewer proportions of female Agents at the post-test than at the pre-test. There are a number of possible reasons for these results. This chapter will explore these reasons using transcripts, to illustrate the ways that the children responded to the treatment. (Research Question 5, p.6)

Hence, an understanding of the possible reasons why the treatment was not able to significantly alter agency in the children's writing will be gained.

Treatment Time

One possible reason why treatment had no significant effect on agency in children's writing is that the intensity and length of treatment may have been inadequate. Children's ideologies about gender are reinforced and perpetuated in many ways: their life experiences (which quite possibly are characterised by real life men and women acting out 'typical' and 'normative' gender roles), the media, parental attitudes, teachers' attitudes, the way language operates and finally, printed texts. (For a more in-depth discussion of these factors, see *Background* chapter.) This research isolated only one of these many possible factors - the books read by children - and dealt with it for only five weeks. This may be considered merely a drop in the proverbial bucket. It could be regarded as unrealistic to expect that children will alter their ideas about gender in such a short space of time and with only one of the many factors which

contribute to the formation of gender ideology isolated and altered. Possibly exposure to and discussion about counter-sexist texts requires more time to disrupt children's gender ideology. However, considering that the proportion of female Agents by the experimental group dropped to zero at the post-test, it is not likely that the treatment would have been successful, even if continued. Nevertheless, it may be worthwhile to point future research in the direction of investigating whether or not an extended treatment time would give different results. e.g. there may have been a 'bottoming out' effect.

'Cultural Trueness' Of Texts

Another possible reason for the failure of the treatment to alter children's gender ideology is that children simply may not accept the contrasting gender ideology presented in counter-sexist texts to be culturally true. Baker and Davies (1993) suggest that child readers "may accept the story world to be 'fictionally true' but not culturally true" (p.63). In other words, the gender order in stories may be accepted as true for the story, but not transferred by the children as being true for the real world. Transcript 1 illustrates this point. The children here are discussing their opinions of the book *Prince Cinders*. (In all transcripts, the gender of the children is indicated by (*m*) for male and (*f*) for female. *R* represents the researcher, who was the only person dealing with the children during discussions. */* represents an interruption of the current speaker's dialogue. All names are pseudonyms.)

Transcript 1: I don't like this book

1. J (m): I don't like this book.
2. R: You don't like that book?
3. J(m): Nuh. I hate that book.
4. R: You hate that book?
5. J (m): Yep
6. R: Why?
7. J (m): Because men aren't fairies and they don't twinkle around the house doing mopping and wear earrings and all that.
8. R: Okay

The child in this case did not enjoy the different version of the gender order presented in this text because he did not accept it to be culturally true. He appeared to dislike the story on the grounds that it didn't fit into what he perceived as true in the real world: *Men aren't fairies and they don't twinkle around the house*. However, women don't twinkle around the house either. The child appeared to reject the story on the basis of gender. *Men* don't do that, however, perhaps women do. He didn't accept the book to be an accurate or acceptable version of the gender order.

It is also interesting to note that belonging to either gender is characterised by particular activities or appearance by this child. Women are the ones who engage in household tasks and wear earrings. This supports Khoshkedal's assertion about women being discriminated against on the basis of appearance (1994) and Gilbert's finding that women are often shown engaging in household tasks (Gilbert, with Rowe, 1989).

Transcript 2 shows another case of one child not accepting the story world to be either fictionally true or culturally true.

Transcript 2: Weird

1. R: So, what did you think of the story? Right, who ... Clare?
2. C (f): I thought it was weird.
3. R: Why? (pause) You don't know? Who else thought it was weird? (Some children raise their hands.) Some people did. Does anyone have any reasons for thinking it's weird? Anne?
4. A (f): Cause princesses aren't strong.
5. R: They can be.

Anne does not accept the story to be fictionally true. She classes the story as *weird* because it does not fit into her ideas about the typical role of a princess. If she does not accept the story world to be fictionally true, it seems unlikely that she will accept it to be culturally true and even less likely that she will change her own gender ideology to become more consistent with the one presented in the story.

Transcript 3 illustrates another case of children not accepting the story world to be culturally true. The children here are discussing the similarities between the book *The Tough Princess* and real life.

Transcript 3: Real life similarities

1. R: Can you see any similarities between this story here and real life? Anything the same about this story and real life?
2. S (m): Some girls like being inside and watching TV and that girl likes, likes getting around and stuff
3. R: How's that the same?
4. S (m): Cause some girls, like they go out and go tadpoling and stuff instead of watching TV.
5. R: Good. Excellent. John?
6. J (m): Some girls they ride bikes and they wear tights but they don't wear like long shoes and take their hands off their bars and go like this (*John pretends to take his hands off the handlebars*) and do fishtails]
7. S (f): [I do
8. S (f): [I do
9. R: Right, so you've pointed out some that were the same and some things that are different.
10. J: Yeah
11. R: Good. Clare?
12. C (f): Oh ... I forgot what I was going to say.
13. R: Oh, I'll come back to you. Barbara?
14. B: (...)
15. R: Good. Clare?
16. C: Girls are usually too scared to bash up dragons.

It can be seen that the children could only see one aspect of gender roles in the story that was the same in real life: that some girls go out tadpoling instead of watching TV. This, however, is as far as some of the children were prepared to go. Girls usually didn't take their hands off the handlebars, nor did they bash up dragons, as usually girls would be too afraid to do these things. This may be a reflection of gender ideology evident in much of children's literature in which males were brave more than four times as often as females (Khoshkedal, 1994).

Resisting And Increasing Fixedness Of Own Position

Another possible reason that the treatment had no significant effect on children's gender ideology is that some children resisted the counter-sexist images presented and actually increased the fixedness of their own gender ideological position. Transcript 4 illustrates this point. The child in this case criticises the author of the book.

Transcript 4: They're sick

1. J (m): Whoever done that, wrote that book, they're sick.
2. R: They're sick?
3. J (m): Yeah.

The child appears to find it unacceptable that an author could conceive the ideas presented in such a text. When challenged by a female student, he increased the fixedness of his position and extended the circle of his disapproval. Transcript 5 illustrates this.

Transcript 5: It's not good for men

1. C (f): John, do you reckon that girls are meant to wear earrings and fly around the house doing all the housework?
2. J (m): No, I'm not saying that. I'm just saying that there shouldn't be stories like that. Well, that men fly around. Like you might see Cinderella or like little stories that, um, like angels or princesses like um do that and have these gold wings and um fly. I mean some girls like that but men, that's not good for men because you don't, you just don't think of men flying around the house with mops and wings and fairy dust and all that sort of stuff.

Here, the child goes further than criticising the content of the book (Transcript 1) and the author (Transcript 4). He criticises the very fact that the book has been published at all: *There shouldn't be stories like that*. He appears to object to the book on moral grounds. This is reflected by his use of the word *shouldn't* and that it is *not good for men*. He is advocating censorship. His own version of the gender order is very much threatened by the one presented in the text. Further, instead of modifying his gender ideology when presented with a contrasting one, he appears to intensify it.

It is interesting to note that this is an interesting collocation here of being a fairy and being a 'housewife'. The two seem to complement and connect with each other in this child's view. The child talks about gold wings, angels and princesses and then goes on to connect these to housework. The two, being a fairy and doing the housework, have no direct link. In fact, there is nothing that will make a person look less like a fairy than sweating around a house doing the housework. Perhaps popular culture, such as advertisements, perpetuate this link.

They often show immaculately dressed and groomed women (princesses/fairies) doing the housework.

In Transcript 6 the children were discussing why the sessions did or did not change their ideas about gender roles. Just prior to this question, the children were asked whether or not the sessions had changed their ideas about gender roles and why. The children raised their hands if they thought the sessions had changed their ideas.

Transcript 6: It's usually the men

1. R: Why has it changed your opinion, you people? Can you think of why it's changed your opinion. Lynette?
1. L (f): Because it shows how people can be equal in ways.
2. R: Good. Yep. Clare?
3. A (f): Cause it's usually, girls are posh and everything and the princes have to rescue them or something.
4. R: Right. So and why hasn't it changed your opinion?
5. J (m): Oh, I think girls can be brave but most of the time I think it's, like you see, like um like there might be someone breaking in the house it's usually the man that comes out with the knife or something and the ladies go ... a vase or something.

It can be seen that a few children said that the sessions had changed the way they thought of gender roles. It should be noted that most of these children were girls. They said that girls and boys were *equal in ways*. However, one child, John stated that the sessions had not changed his views on gender because the counter-sexist texts were not viewed by him to be

culturally true. *Girls can be brave*, but usually they're not. i.e. the girls in the counter-sexist texts could be described as brave, however, they're not usually brave in real life. This shows another instance of bravery and that it is generally associated with boys (Khoshkedal, 1994). So, it appears that some children resist the images presented in the counter-sexist texts on the basis that they are not culturally true. (See previous section on 'Cultural Trueness').

Reconstructing Gender Order

Another possible reason for the failure of the treatment to alter children's gender ideology is that some children could not accept the different version of the counter-sexist texts and set about reconstructing the gender order of the story. Transcript 6 shows how one child in this study was able to do so. The children were predicting a possible story line from the title and front cover of the text *The Tough Princess*.

Transcript 6: Is that a she?

1. J (m): About a princess that's tough and like he might be really mean to]
2. S (m): [she
3. J (m): Or she ... or ... is that a *she*?
4. S (m): The tough *princess*
5. J (m): Well, might be a tomboy and then might be really nasty to all people, then
might be ... then at the end she might be really good.

Despite the book title being *The Tough Princess*, and the front cover illustration showing a human figure with long hair in plaits, the child did not *read* the story to be about a female. He

was not able, initially, to accept that the book was about a tough female. When he was corrected by another child, he then used the term *tomboy*, a special or different type of female. Girls are not usually tough, so therefore this girl must be a tomboy. This still didn't appear to sit comfortably with him and he went on to conclude that she might change her ways at the end and *be really good*. Thus he was able to reconstruct the possible story line to one that is more familiar and acceptable to him.

Hypothesis Guessing

A puzzling aspect of this study was that quite a few students were perceived to agree with and hold the gender order presented in the counter-sexist texts as their own. They were able to discuss how men and women are portrayed to behave in counter-sexist texts and agree that not all women are passive and submissive and that not all men are aggressive and competitive. Transcript 7 illustrates this point. Here the children had just been asked what they had learnt throughout the sessions.

Transcript 7: Men and women are just the same

1. R: Have you learnt anything over the last five sessions?
2. M (m): Some girls can beat you up.
3. R: Right, yes. John?
4. J (m): That you can learn that like not all girls are weak um like some girls like they can beat you up and that but like and they're not like girls that do the housework all the time.
5. P (m): Men and women are like just the same.

6. R: Right, how do you mean?
7. P (m): Like they can both do housework and they can both do handywork
8. R: Good. Lynette?
9. L (f): Like men can be weak and like um sort of like weak and small and all wimpy and stuff and a girl girls can be brave too.

The children were able to discuss how men and women can fill various roles, without being constrained by their gender, that *Men and women are like just the same*. This, however, did not correspond with the results, i.e. that the treatment had no significant effect on male or female Actors or Agents. It follows that, if many students agreed with the gender order presented in the counter-sexist texts, then the proportion of male and female Agents and Actors would change. Why then was this perceived vocal acceptance of the contrasting gender ideology not transferred by the children into their own writing? It may be that the children were trying to guess what the researcher wanted them to say and providing the 'correct' answers; answers that were politically correct in the context of the sessions. If this were the case, then the children may not actually have voiced their own opinions, but may have given the opinions they thought the researcher found desirable. The researcher's reactions to the children's responses may also have made hypothesis guessing easier. For example, in Transcript 7, the researcher responded to the children's comments with *right*, *yes*, and *good*. This may have made it easier for the children to guess what were considered to be desirable comments. However, it is difficult to state definitively that this is the case because it is impossible to lay open children's thinking processes.

Texts

Another possible reason for the treatment having no significant effect on agency in children's own writing lies in the texts themselves. The counter-sexist texts, although portraying females and males in non-stereotypical roles, were still heavily gendered. By this it is meant that the texts portray gender as being a very important issue. Characters in the texts are separated into two camps - males and females. This is indicative of many texts read by children and it is difficult to locate texts which are not heavily gendered. Baker and Davies (1993) conducted a survey of commonly used children books and found that gendered references to people appeared 4.5 times more often than ungendered references to living creatures (p. 56). It follows then, that treatment may have been more valid if it had presented the children with texts that did not place such importance on gender. Rather, exposure to books that presented males and females in non-stereotypical roles but without emphasising gender may have been more effective. This would also hinder the children from hypothesis guessing as it may have been less obvious that the sessions were about gender.

Furthermore, as stated in the *Instruments* section (Chapter 4), it was very difficult to locate counter-sexist texts. The texts selected for this study did challenge traditional gender stereotypes in that they portrayed men and women in non-stereotypical roles. However, *The Tough Princess* (Waddell, 1986) and *The Wrestling Princess* (Corbalis, 1986) still maintained the traditional notion of women searching for a husband, even though the manner in which the women found their husbands was non-traditional. Counter-sexist stories need to be located which not only portray men and women in non-stereotypical roles, but additionally, cease to portray women as searchers of spouses.

Critical Reading

Another possible reason for the failure of treatment to significantly change children's gender ideology may be that children need to be taught critical reading strategies in order for them to be able resist traditional gender stereotyping. This notion is supported by Smith (1994). Her research involved looking at "discourses used by seven-year-old children to interpret gender in texts" (p.1) and she started her research with the premise that "progressive literature by itself will not change reading practices or make progressive discourses available to readers; Children also need the discourses to be made available to them with which they might interpret the literature in progressive terms" (p.2). Her findings suggest that "readings are not wholly determined by the texts nor even by the discourses available to the children"(p.3). In other words, even when progressive discourses were made available to children, these appeared insufficient to interrupt the readers' gender ideology. This may indicate future research in the direction of critical reading as a means of enabling children to challenge dominant reading positions in texts.

Diffusion Effect

A possible explanation for both groups' writing containing a decreased proportion of female Agents at the post-test is that a diffusion effect may have occurred. This is when subjects from one group talk to subjects from another group. The children from the experimental group may have spoken to the children from the control group. It can be seen, as has been discussed in this chapter, that some children in the experimental group resisted the gender

order presented in the counter-sexist texts and actually increased the fixedness of their own positions. Could it be that exposure to and discussion about counter-sexist texts actually has the opposite effect to what many theorists propose, i.e. that counter-sexist texts help to disrupt children's gender ideology? If this was the case, then surely there would have been a significant interaction effect. This was, however, not the case. (See *Results* chapter). Therefore, a diffusion effect seems to be unlikely.

Conclusion

The transcripts presented here cannot be assumed to be indicative of the full range of responses presented by children when confronted with counter sexist texts. They do however, illustrate that children's ideas about gender are complicated and that the process of interrupting their gender ideologies is very complex indeed.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

This section will summarise responses produced by participants, other possible reasons for results, indications for future research and provide implications for classroom teachers.

Responses Produced by Participants

This research has described the various responses produced by children when they are presented with counter-sexist texts in an attempt to explain why treatment failed to significantly alter agency in children's writing. Firstly, some children did not accept the counter-sexist texts to be culturally true and, as a result, resisted the gender order presented in such texts. Secondly, some children increased the fixedness of their gender positions when confronted with such texts, rather than altering their own gender positions. Thirdly, some children were able to reconstruct the gender order presented in the counter-sexist texts so that it more closely matched their own.

Other Possible Explanations for Results

This research has also sought to present other possible explanations for the failure of the treatment to significantly alter proportions of male and female Actors and Agents. Firstly, the treatment time and scope were considered. Secondly, the texts themselves may not have been effective, as they were heavily gendered and two of them portrayed women in the traditional role of searching for a spouse. Thirdly, critical reading was raised as an alternative to counter-

sexist texts in being an effective strategy in assisting children to resist the dominant gender order in stories. It was also suggested that hypothesis guessing by the children may have been a factor. Finally, the possibility of a diffusion effect was considered but rejected due to the fact that there were no interaction effects with the experimental group.

Indications for Future Research

Indications for future research were also provided. Firstly, the possibility cannot be discounted that longer or more intense treatment may produce different results. Secondly, less gendered texts could be employed to assist children in resisting traditional gender stereotypes. Thirdly, critical reading strategies could be evaluated to determine their effectiveness in altering children's gender ideology.

Implications for Classroom Teachers

It is difficult to offer implications to teachers of the English language as this research found that exposure to and discussion about counter-sexist texts was not able to significantly alter participants' gender ideology for reasons outlined in the *Discussion* chapter. However, it may be beneficial to teach students critical reading strategies so that they are more able to resist traditional gender stereotyping in the texts they read and compose. The Western Australian English Student Outcome Statements substrand of Contextual Understanding in the strand of Reading and Viewing addresses this skill. It seeks to assist students to understand "socio-cultural and situational contexts that ...(they)... bring to bear when composing and comprehending texts" (Education Department of Western Australia, 1994a, p. 1). Table 4

outlines some specific outcomes and pointers from the English Student Outcome Statements which seeks to teach children critical reading strategies.

Table 4.

Relevance for Classroom Teachers Using English Student Outcome Statements in the Substrand of Contextual Understanding in the Strand of Reading and Viewing

Number	Outcomes	Pointers
2.2	Understands that texts are constructed by people and represent real and imaginary experience.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider on the basis of personal knowledge and experience, how likely are the events, behaviour, settings and outcomes found in texts. Discuss the ways different groups of people are represented in texts.
3.2	Identifies simple symbolic meanings and stereotypes in texts and discusses their purpose and meaning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discuss the ways in which people are stereotyped in texts, recognising that that people could have been represented differently. Discuss how people from different socio-cultural or minority groups or people in particular roles are represented in texts and whether these representations are accurate or fair.
4.2	Explains possible reasons for people's varying interpretations of a text.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider how changes to aspects of a text can alter people's interpretations of meaning.

6.2	Considers the contexts in which texts were or are created and how these are reflected in texts.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider why war stories might exclude women.
7.2	Considers a variety of interrelationships between texts, contexts, readers or viewers and makers of texts.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make links between social issues and the production and circulation processes of media texts (examine the proposition that popular media represent the dominant culture and minority groups are often ignored or misrepresented).
8.2	Analyses texts in terms of the socio-cultural values, attitudes and assumptions they project and reflect.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parody text types to make a point about the values, attitudes, beliefs and reading practices that underpin such texts.

The pointers for Outcome Statements 2.2 and 3.2 are particularly relevant to this research.

Secondly, it cannot be harmful to expose students to count-sexist texts. Indeed, children may need texts which offer each gender different ways of being. However, pressure needs to be maintained on publishers of children's books in order for there to be a variety of non-sexist texts available. As has been stated previously, there are still few texts available which do not portray men and women in traditional roles despite a growing awareness for the need of non-sexist children's literature.

In the final analysis, without a shift in the gender ideology of our society, the popular media, the way we speak and interact, parental and teacher behaviour cannot change. Reciprocally, the gender ideology of our society cannot change either if the popular media, parental and teacher behaviour and the way we speak and interact do not begin to reflect differing views of gender. They are echoes of each other and reflect the interconnections between our language and our society.

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Appendix A. Treatment Activities and Synopses of Texts

Week 1: The Tough Princess.

Princess Rosamund’s parents wanted a boy so that he could make them rich. However, they had Princess Rosamund. The king decided that perhaps having a girl wasn’t such a bad thing. He decided to annoy a bad fairy and get Princess Rosamund into trouble. In this way, a handsome prince could rescue her and then they could all go and live in his castle. However, Princess Rosamund wasn’t like most princesses. The king’s idea did not go off as planned. Princess Rosamund bashed up the bad fairy and decided to catch a prince in her own way. So she set off on an adventure to find herself a prince. The story describes these adventures and tells how Princess Rosamund did find a prince in the end. However, it was not in the way she had planned.

The children were asked to complete the following worksheet after this session.

	Character Adjectives	Verbs	Appearance
Traditional Princess			
Princess Rosamund			

Week 2: Prince Cinders.

Prince Cinders was not the usual prince. He was small and puny. His brothers, however, were muscular and hairy. They made Prince Cinders do all the housework while they went to discos. One night, a dirty fairy fell down the chimney and decided to grant Prince Cinders his dearest wish. She attempted to transform Prince Cinders into a big, handsome and hairy prince, but somehow botched it up. However, Prince Cinders did not realise how he looked and set off for the disco. The story tells how he met a pretty princess and ended up marrying her, in a reverse of the Cinderella story. His big, hairy brothers were eventually punished by the fairy and were made to do the housework for ever and ever.

The children were asked to draw their ideal self after this session.

Week 3: The Wrestling Princess.

Princess Ermyntrude was not the usual princess. She was six feet tall and liked to wrestle. The king eventually became fed up with her antics. She was nearly sixteen years old and should be married so that the king could have a successor. He told Ermyntrude that she should become enchantingly beautiful, dainty and weak in order to attract a husband. Ermyntrude, however, had other plans. She did not want to be married, so she set out to sabotage her father's plans. The king held a series of competitions to choose the most suitable husband. The first competition was one of height because the prince should be taller than the princess. The second competition was one of disposition. The prince should be able to match Ermyntrude's fiery temper. The final competition was one of strength because the prince

should be at least as strong as the princess. The competitions went according to plan. The story tells how Princess Ermyntude and the prince she fell in love with and was eventually to marry, tricked the king. He was, in fact, shorter than Ermyntude, but he shared a love of machines and engines with Ermyntude.

The children were asked to draw and identify their hobbies or interests after this session.

Week 4: The Paper Bag Princess.

Princess Elizabeth was a beautiful and wealthy princess. She was all set to marry Prince Ronald. However, one morning, a dragon smashed her castle, burnt all her clothes and carried off Prince Ronald. So Elizabeth put on a paper bag (the only thing that was not burned) and set off to rescue him. The story tells how she was able to trick the dragon and rescue Prince Ronald. Prince Ronald, however, was not impressed by Princess Elizabeth's attire and told her to come back to him when she looked more like a beautiful princess. Princess Elizabeth realised that Prince Ronald was not a very nice person at all and decided not to marry him after all. The final page in the story shows Princess Elizabeth dancing off by herself into the sunset.

The children were asked to draw their favourite part of the story after this session.

Week 5: Princess Beatrice And The Rotten Robbers.

Princess Beatrice was a regular princess. She lived in a castle and wore lots of jewels. One day, a robber came to the castle to steal jewels. He saw Princess Beatrice with all her jewels on and decided to take her. The story tells how Princess Beatrice outwitted the robber, managed to tie him up and find her own way back to the castle. The robber was made to clean the royal jewels for ever, seeing as he liked jewels so much.

The children were asked to write one or two things that they learnt or enjoyed from the stories and discussions after this session.

Appendix B. Instructions To Classroom Teachers

Teachers, please read these instructions to the children prior to writing. Read the instructions exactly as they have been written.

Today you are going to write a story on a topic of your choice. Please take out your pens and rulers.

Distribute paper.

Please rule up your page in the usual way.

Wait until all children have finished.

I want you to write a story on a topic of your choice. It must not be a recount. That means you mustn't simply write about something that has happened to you. You are to make up a story of your own.

The story should be at least one page long.

Try to make your story as interesting as possible.

You are not to talk during your writing time.

You have 40 minutes to complete your story.

Appendix C. Coding Table

Actors	Process	Medium	Other	Comments

Appendix D. Example Of A Coded Text

Child's own narrative writing raw sample.

Words in italics are the researcher's interpretation of the child's words. Spelling and punctuation errors have not been altered.

It was a bright suney (*sunny*) day and we had to go to spaky (*spacky*) school. The (*then*) our class went to the library to watch a vidio (*video*). The vidio (*video*) marshen (*machine*) brock (*broke*) down so we had to watch the new (*news*). On the new (*news*) people said they saw a space ship land around the area then the bell went for reses (*recess*). When we came in we turned on the radio it had been reported that there was five slimy crectures (*creatures*) with three heads and three legs and they had eaten school A, school B and school C (*names of the schools have been changed to protect their identity*) and eaten half of the suburb. When (*then we*) had to write stuped (*stupid*) myth then werd (*we heard*) a knock on the door Bob (*name has been changed*) got up and anwerd (*answered*) it we saw all this blood so half of the class went out side and where (*were*) never sene (*seen*) agen (*again*) then we saw a long slimy thing it start (*started*) to eat everone (*everyone*) in the class starting with the teacher.

Coding notes from subject's writing sample.

Actors (involved in a material or behavioural process)		Process	Medium	Other	Comments
We		had to go		to spacky school	C
The video machine		broke down			
We		had to watch		the news	R
We	A	turned on	the radio		
They (<i>aliens</i>)	A	had eaten	School A, School B and School C.		Names of schools have been changed to protect school's identity.
They (<i>ellipsis</i>)	A	eaten	half of the suburb		
We		had to write		a stupid myth	R
Bob		got up			
Bob (<i>ellipsis</i>)	A	answered	it (<i>the door</i>)		Note metaphorical reference
It (<i>long slimy thing</i>)	A	started to eat	everyone	in the class	C

KEY

R: Range

C: Circumstance

A: Agent

Appendix E. Pre-Test Raw Data

Some Agents and Actors were plural, involving both genders, or neutral and therefore not all percentages total 100.

Pre-test raw data: clauses with agency.

Group	Gender	Subject	Total No of clauses	CLAUSES WITH AGENCY				
				No of clauses with agency	No of male Agents	% of male Agents	No of female Agents	% of female Agents
E X P E R I M E N T A L G R O U P	F	1	30	8	1	12.5	7	87.5
	F	2	58	12	11	91.7	0	0
	F	3	22	5	1	20	2	40
	F	4	20	6	0	0	6	100
	F	5	52	1	1	100	0	0
	M	6	30	6	6	100	0	0
	M	7	30	5	4	80	0	0
	M	8	37	6	6	100	0	0
	M	9	18	2	2	100	0	0
	M	10	43	11	10	90.9	1	9.1
C O N T R O L G R O U P	F	11	14	1	0	0	1	100
	F	12	31	3	1	33.3	0	0
	F	13	42	4	0	0	4	100
	F	14	47	2	1	50	0	0
	F	15	26	4	2	50	0	0
	M	16	29	3	3	100	0	0
	M	17	19	13	12	92.3	0	0
	M	18	26	11	7	63.6	4	36.4
	M	19	35	11	9	81.8	0	0
	M	20	32	8	0	0	2	25

Pre-test raw data: Clauses with material/behavioural processes (not including agents).

				CLAUSES WITH MATERIAL/BEHAVIOURAL PROCESSES (NOT INCLUDING AGENTS)				
Group	Gender	Subject	Total No of clauses	No of clauses	No of male Actors	% of male Actors	No of female Actors	% female Actors
E X P E R I M E N T A L G R O U P	F	1	30	18	3	16.7	13	72.2
	F	2	58	24	18	75	4	16.7
	F	3	22	6	1	16.7	3	50
	F	4	20	8	0	0	8	100
	F	5	52	6	3	50	2	33.3
	M	6	30	12	11	91.7	0	0
	M	7	30	7	4	57.1	1	14.3
	M	8	37	9	7	77.8	0	0
	M	9	18	4	3	75	0	0
	M	10	43	16	15	93.8	1	6.2
C O N T R O L G R O U P	F	11	14	3	0	0	2	66.7
	F	12	31	5	1	20	1	20
	F	13	42	14	0	0	14	100
	F	14	47	6	1	16.7	3	50
	F	15	26	6	3	50	1	16.7
	M	16	29	10	10	100	0	0
	M	17	19	13	12	92.3	0	0
	M	18	26	13	7	53.8	5	38.5
	M	19	35	16	11	68.8	0	0
	M	20	32	11	0	0	3	27.3

Appendix E. Post-Test Raw Data

Post-test raw data: Clauses with agency.

Group	Gender	Subject	No of clauses	CLAUSES WITH AGENCY				
				No of clauses with agency	No of male Agents	% of male Agents	No of female Agents	% of female Agents
E X P E R I M E N T A L G R O U P	F	1	32	2	0	0	0	0
	F	2	25	5	1	20	0	0
	F	3	18	6	0	0	0	0
	F	4	26	2	0	0	0	0
	F	5	23	7	7	100	0	0
	M	6	11	1	1	100	0	0
	M	7	33	5	5	100	0	0
	M	8	29	6	2	33.3	0	0
	M	9	15	2	2	100	0	0
	M	10	41	10	8	80	0	0
C O N T R O L G R O U P	F	11	29	5	1	20	0	0
	F	12	33	4	0	0	1	25
	F	13	44	2	0	0	1	50
	F	14	39	6	6	100	0	0
	F	15	29	2	0	0	0	0
	M	16	19	4	3	75	0	0
	M	17	24	3	3	100	0	0
	M	18	17	5	3	60	0	0
	M	19	23	7	0	0	0	0
	M	20	27	11	10	90.9	0	0

Post-test raw data: Clauses with material/behavioural processes (not including agents).

Group	Gender	Subject	CLAUSES WITH MATERIAL/BEHAVIOURAL PROCESSES (NOT INCLUDING AGENTS)				
			No of clauses	No of male Actors	% of male Actors	No of female Actors	% female Actors
EXPERIMENTAL GROUP	F	1	5	1	20	0	0
	F	2	19	2	20	0	0
	F	3	10	1	10	2	20
	F	4	3	0	0	0	0
	F	5	11	10	90.9	0	0
	M	6	2	2	100	0	0
	M	7	16	3	18.8	13	81.2
	M	8	9	2	22.2	0	0
	M	9	7	4	57.1	0	0
	M	10	16	13	81.2	0	0
CONTROL GROUP	F	11	14	1	7.14	1	7.14
	F	12	16	0	0	15	93.8
	F	13	10	0	0	4	40
	F	14	9	9	100	0	0
	F	15	9	0	0	7	77.8
	M	16	10	4	40	0	0
	M	17	8	6	75	0	0
	M	18	6	4	66.7	0	0
	M	19	12	1	8.3	0	0
	M	20	15	11	73.3	0	0